

3. Discuss the relationship between mainstream media and sustainability. Include at least four references from your work this semester.

822 Words

Is green the new black? In a world dominated by the media, and a media dictated by the world, mainstream media is explicitly linked to the fad of the day. Recent, "sneaky" advertising techniques have blurred the lines between individual thoughts and manufacture induced ideas. The latest trend in psychological advertising combined with shady green-washing, misinformation, and cultural values in the United States all weave an intricate web into the matrix of sustainability complicating both problem identification, and solution generation.

The kind of psychological advertising, emotional persuasion, and manufactured desire seen in The Persuaders and the story of Song airline is an example of mainstream media creating an unsustainable organization of media and information that leaves the consumer perpetually unhappy, searching for the latest and greatest of any given "thing" by establishing a subconscious link between an emotion and a product. In order to establish this sort of link between object and feeling plays on the very fragile and inherently human emotional desires of acceptance and fulfillment. This sort of worth-establishment from items owned, things purchased, and money spent is a recipe for a sustainability disaster of waste and self-worthlessness. While incredibly economically sustainable—as in self-sustaining—under the capitalist structure of the United States, it establishes an incredibly self-destructive precedent behaviorally, culturally, and socially.

Green-washing, falsely labeling products as sustainable, or green, or eco-friendly, has led to a proliferation of information, and more importantly *misinformation*, on the present day green movement. Many companies and products have generated phony labels and/or feel-good graphics that allow consumers to pat them on the back about purchases that may in fact have no basis in any sort of sustainable practices. Unlike many other labels and seals given to products, very few of these are regulated by the government and thus may mean nothing and essentially is a meaningless sticker on the product purchased. However, these stickers and icons can become recognizable, common place, and mainstream, further clouding the media and branding of sustainability. When the environmental movement in America first began in the United States it ultimately fizzled out with a change to a more conservative and economically motivated governmental authority that when coupled with the cold war, Russian competition, and cheap oil prices, fell almost entirely out of favor and the media until very recently. As discussed in the class, the term "sustainability" is a relatively new term, with sustainability education even newer. This sort of fluctuating "popularity" behind

sustainability and “going green” means that mainstream media and advertising will absolutely latch onto the idea seeing it as a sort of money making fad. This sort of mentality is exactly the thought process that leads to green-washing as opposed to an actual greening of products or processes.

On the opposite end of green-washing, there is the blatantly unsustainable, such as our agricultural and food systems. Many Americans either ignore or do not know where their food is originating and/or how it found its way to the local grocery store, so nicely pre-packaged. It is this ignorance of the general public that allows industrial farms and big agriculture to continue thriving under such dangerously unsustainable practices of feeding, farming, and slaughtering our food supply. While many people are aware of the advantages of organic and free-range foods, they may be less aware of explicit disadvantages of genetically modified and industrially farmed foods. That general lack of knowledge and environmental awareness when coupled with the price-tag and inaccessibility of many organic foods, consumers tend to make the simpler and cheaper choice in the grocery store. Perhaps, in this instance, yes, ignorance is bliss, but it is this ignorance is slowly sucking us dry socially, environmentally, and organizationally. When every day Americans let their dollar speak for them, every day, it is critical where that dollar is going, where it is being spent, and thus, what it is saying. As seen in the film Fresh, the consumer does have the power to tip the scales of big agriculture in favor of sustainability, but perhaps only by making sure that their money is where their mouth is; after all, who says that media isn't a label on the pound of beef bought at the grocery store?

Culturally, it is this combination of factors that has brought us to a grossly unsustainable organization where media dictates how we spend our lives and our money; how we organize ourselves, and how we give value to objects and people alike. We have not only established a society in which others perception of you can mean everything, but also where your own perspective is skewed. By becoming so dependent on the media, be it social, internet, TV, or other, our inherent unsustainability is linked with mainstream media to the point of becoming mutually dependent on each other; and it is the capitalist framework upon which our country is founded that seems to support the twisted fate of media and unsustainability in America.

6. Describe a film idea intended to educate a particular audience about a sustainability problem. Describe the audience you intend to reach, and its characteristics (biases, ignorance, expertise, etc.); the aim of the film; its narrative structure and its content.

1,165 Words

Global Garbage is a film idea aimed at the general public to enhance knowledge on several different garbage collection systems happening around the globe. The main purpose of the film would be to combat the "throw-away" mentality to disclose what exactly happens and where after someone puts something in the garbage. What happens most often depends on which country is the one doing the throwing-away. There is an interesting catalog of several different case studies which would serve as specific examples and case studies in the film.

With a film that would perhaps be most beneficial to the general American public; it begins with a scene following several garbage men on one of their daily routes collecting street side garbage from residential neighborhoods. Those scenes are interlaced with narrative about the system of recycling, garbage, sewage, and landfills in the United States. Interviews with both the home residents and the city waste employees will be conducted to show the different points of views on both garbage and the job of being "a garbage man." Perhaps to expose the general mentality of many Americans, school children can be interviewed and asked what they want to be when they grow up. After the answers are revealed, that should then be asked if they would want to be a garbage man, with their reactions filmed. My general hunch is that the children will be surprised by the question and feel that no, they do not have any desire to pick up other peoples trash in their adult lives. Once the case for the American system, and the mentality that it perpetuates, is made, the location would change to move on to another case study.

Picking up filming in South America, will show a drastically different lifestyle of garbage collection. Here, there is rarely any federally or state funded garbage system; instead people dispose of their own waste, be it in the water, on the streets, or in a dump. Filming in Buenos Aires, Argentina will bring about the phenomenon of the *Cartoneros* explains the first informal garbage collectors in the state that were the pioneers of recycling in the capital. The *Cartoneros* play a key role in the "Zero Garbage Plan" for 2020 that the government has put forward. The *cartoneros* are effectively the "garbage pickers" and "dumpster divers" that we see in the United States; collecting trash and sifting through it to see what has material value. In Buenos Aires these *cartoneros* then return that sorted material to a recycling plant and receive payment for their return. Here, the aim is to eradicate any recyclables from landfills and thus eliminate any need to introduce new material into the recycle system. The *cartoneros* have become a widely respected class that provides a crucial service to the nation and the state of the land as well as the general quality of life by removing trash from the streets. Here, there is no stigma assigned with the garbage collectors. The years prior to the *cartoneros*, years without any sort of garbage collection, have shown

citizens how important the cartoneros are to the system of daily life. This portion of the film would also focus on following a cartonero through his or her daily routine, from trash collection, to sorting, to return, and back home again. Interviews would also play a key role to both discuss The Zero Garbage Plan and the opinion of cartoneros by the general public that is producing the waste.

Traveling again, this time to the Middle East, filming is resumed in Cairo, Egypt. Here, there is another informal sort of garbage collection, the *zabal*. Individual families contract an individual to come to their home and remove their bagged garbage from the premises. Here it is a hybrid of the U.S. and Argentinean systems; garbage is collected from the home, like in the U.S., but like in Argentina, it is all an informal system made up of individuals, made up of *zabals*, garbage men. The government acknowledges its existence as a garbage collection system, but does not intervene on it in any way be it financially or systematically. This particular system as another facet that isn't immediately noticeable. Many of these *zabals* come from generations of *zabals* where entire family will take claim on collecting the garbage of specific families; turf wars arise as new *zabals* try to move into already claimed areas; families can become blacklisted by the *zabals* and unable to obtain garbage collection. In this instance, it is often the *zabal* that can have the power to collect or not collect; it is a delicate play between household and *zabal* for pay, as each family pays their own specific amount to have their garbage collected. Here, the *zabal* is rarely in a position to negotiate for higher pay, however if the family underpays, they may become blacklisted and no longer have any garbage collection services; thus the *zabals* often make a decent living collecting the garbage of others. In these scenes it will be important to show the tradeoffs; the *zabals* do much of their collection on foot and as such it is an incredibly physically demanding job with much wear and tear on the human body. Another component of this system is the "one man's trash is another man's treasure" theory. The *zabals* have first dibs and exclusive rights on anything that they might want from the garbage; more often than not, it is pharmaceuticals.

The last on location case study would be Sweden. Here Sweden shows the sort of idealized reality where they use their garbage so efficiently, that they actually import trash in order to meet their demands. With 99% of Swedish trash recycled, importing garbage to use to generate energy for the nation has become a very successful business practice. This segment of the film should follow the daily lives of citizens as they dispose of their waste, and then follow the waste to the plant that it is converted into energy. While the Swedish case will serve as a sort of "looking-forward" segment of the global garbage systems, it cannot go without saying that if everyone manages to use their trash as efficiently as the Swiss, then there will be no trash to be imported for increased energy demands.

Most importantly, Global Garbage would serve as a catalog of various garbage collection systems across the world in an effort to encourage people to question the garbage system that they are familiar with by showing them that there are other

systems out there that are working. The final wrap-up would hopefully encourage people to think twice about their waste and what is in fact "waste" versus what can still serve another purpose; double check what can and cannot be recycled in order to optimize the reduce reuse recycle mantra; and to eliminate or reduce the stigmas associated with trash in much of the western world. Indeed, perhaps the greatest insight into a person's if from their trash can looking out.

7. Explain five (5) actions that you think the average citizens can/should take to advance sustainability. Include concrete examples to illustrate your ideas.

797 Words

With sustainability finally in the public light and mainstream media, and [almost] unanimous agreement that global warming is indeed happening and is indeed a topic of concern, it is more difficult for the average citizen to feign ignorance on the topic. However, let us not say that the general public is aware of the multi-faceted web of sustainability issues. That being said, there are many actions—both deliberate and covert—that the average citizen can take in order to move towards and promote a more sustainable existence in today's world.

Design, innovation, and technology have advanced society in ways that have had both positive and negative impacts on the environment. For example, the industrial revolution while modernizing cities worldwide and propelling many nations into the “first-world,” it also greatly strained, degraded, and de-valued the natural environment. On the other hand, it is this industrialization that paved the way to many modern-day innovations that operate with a much more efficient use of resources. The sort of Holy Grail of these everyday innovations is perhaps the dishwasher. Today's high efficiency dishwasher, when run fully loaded, is more energy efficient and uses less water than washing dishes by hand. Thus, while we are not always able to design ourselves out of the problem, it can certainly lead us in the right direction. According to the *Natural Resources Defense Council*, when the average citizen updates all the appliances in their home to the high efficient counterpart (dishwasher, shower head, faucet, stove, dryer, clothes washer, etc.), they can reduce their energy and resource use by as much as half.

One of the greatest sources of carbon introduction into our atmosphere is via the automobile; the everyday automobile that many Americans see as a purchase that benchmarks success. Between the actual gasoline required to power the car, and the carbon emissions that result from its use, the average citizen can absolutely make a difference by simply driving less, especially when applied to the masses. This offers an array of solutions all preferable to driving an individual vehicle. Public and mass transit (where available) offer a very effective alternative to driving. When deployed in highly urban, highly congested, environments, public transit can not only reduce the number of cars on the road and result emissions, but can also provide a healthy alternative to the often anti-social urban reality of the city. In areas more susceptible to sprawl and thus less conducive to public transportation, healthy and relatively simple alternatives include biking and/or carpooling with those around you. Ultimately, a precursor to these sort of problems (and thus the ideal scenario), is to leave on close proximity to the work place as work-day commute accounts for hundreds of thousands of cars on the road twice a day, five days a week.

Mainstream education on mental health and other health issues with associated social and cultural stigma, is lacking at best. The average citizen can absolutely play an

impact on that shortfall of American media and education by raising awareness and reducing stigmas by encouraging people to help others and those suffering to seek help for issues that they are struggling. While this may seem like an idealized suggestion, it is already happening on several college campuses. For example, students at Georgetown University have banded together to create the "Active Minds" coalition that disbands information on mental health, diagnosis, and receiving health. If these same sorts of local pop-ups on the issue expanded their reach perhaps into both high schools and work environments, we could easily get people talking on these taboo topics, as the first step towards generating solutions.

Another spin-off suggestion for moving the average citizen towards a sustainable lifestyle is to buy organic free-range eggs. While that may seem a small scale intervention, it offers many ripple effects that other organic purchases may not. Since much of the dilemma with moving towards sustainable eating habits (and thus sustainable farming), is an economic one, changing the eggs that you buy offers the most "bang-for-your-buck" so to speak. Since eggs themselves come from chickens, free-range and organic eggs must come from free-range, organic chickens, thus allowing one purchase to support two sustainable practices. As seen in the suggestions for change at the end of Fresh in capitalist America, where one spends their dollar often speaks the loudest.

From five very different suggestions for a change of action on five very different topics within the sustainability matrix, it is heartening to see the many options that one has to take a step in the right direction. Sustainability, while a complex web of many problems and solutions, also means that intervening on one problem has the opportunity to affect many others within the web. Average actions by the average citizen, could be the way to above-average change.

8. Explain five (5) actions that you think the US government should take to advance sustainability. Include concrete examples to illustrate your ideas.

796 Words

The United States, while one of the wealthiest and most modern countries, and certainly one of the most industrialized in the world and in the western world, fails its citizens in several aspects of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a relatively young nation, the question of sustainability for the United States is an interesting one with much innovation in a short span of history and little time for reflection on the effects of this innovation. In order to better deal with the issues of sustainability within the United States, there are a select assortment of topics of intervention that the government can use as a launching point into bettering the web of sustainability.

First and foremost, education is an imperative for a more aware, socially conscious society. If the problem is not discussed and acknowledged, there is no way to begin a solution. Thus, it is mind-boggling that the U.S. government is slowly (and not so slowly) bankrupting future generations as the cost of obtaining an education. Federal loans are harder than ever to obtain and have a higher interest rate than ever before. In the instances that a student does not qualify for federal aid, they are more often than not forced to either make a sacrifice on their educational preferences and/or take on personal loans with exorbitant interest rates and shading repayment practices. The government could do both its citizens and itself a great service to better subsidize (and equally subsidize!) the education of future generations that will carry on the future of the nation.

Nationwide, while recycling itself does require a lot of energy and space it becomes a sustainability issue when sharing energy and space with sewage treatment and landfills. However if the government moves to make the entire country recycle, it would reduce the amount of energy and space dedicated to trash, allowing some of that same space and energy to instead be allocated to recycling. While this may seem like a sort of "no-brainer" solution because many municipalities do have recycling, however there are still many without any recycling, or with partial recycling. Often these programs are partially subsidized by the citizen; full government subsidization would increase participation in the programs reducing waste and increasing re-use of materials, decreasing the requirements to introduce new materials into the system.

Separation of church and state has been a fundamental founding principle of the nation in order to insure the religious freedom that was not granted in English control. The government could also do well to establish a separation of *charge and state*; liberating politics from the financial pull that dictates it, as is the case today. Another founding principle of the nation was no taxation without representation; while still effectively "true," the largest dollar amount certainly speaks the loudest in politics skewing the reality of taxation, representation, money, and political sway.

A semester of films, studies, and presentations on food, food waste, and food health (or the lack thereof in this country) is absolutely in need of re-evaluating our food

production system within the United States. Like the years of the slaughterhouses and Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, perhaps it is time to re-explore today's jungle with another expose on the system of our food production, manufacturing and packaging system. Perhaps a new look on our food delivery system as well; the sequel to the muck-raking publication, this time around: The Concrete Jungle.

Hand-in-hand with food production is the drug industry in America. Pharmaceuticals have taken hold of America in a way that we've never seen before. Beginning with life-changing vaccines for polio and smallpox, we have moved onto a host of Adderall and Anti-Depressant cocktails that are as common place as the people taking them. While there is of course merit in medication and treating illnesses and the marvels of modern medicine, it can't help but seem that Americans in particular have a tendency to self-medicate, and numb the senses as opposed to dealing with the actual roots of the problems. Why is it that pill popping carries fewer stigmas than acknowledging a mental or emotional problem? This entire system is exacerbated by the constant flow of funding by large scale corporations into drug research and pharmaceutical development; the issues being remedied by drugs tend to go hand in hand with the largest dollar amount. Another re-evaluation of the funds behind drug research could offer a more sustainable, and scientifically, medically useful focus on drug development.

Ultimately, many of the sustainability problems intertwined in the web of the United States Government become linked with questionable financial motives and pressures. Perhaps here the greater question is the social sustainability of capitalism; however that involves a very difficult and delicate evaluation and solution to actually suggest and eventually implement a solution.

9. Identify five (5) actions that college students should take to advance sustainability. Include concrete examples to illustrate your ideas.

778 Words

While as a college student, it is difficult to see beyond the window of loans and month to month payments, there are still several daily changes that can collectively take large strides towards sustainability. Within a college campus, it's frequently hard to remove yourself from the sort of system of unsustainability that may or may not be present within the institution. Depending on how dependent on the campus a student is, may perhaps influence their ability to make more sustainable decisions on their own. However, the following is a catalog of suggestions that perhaps offer a venue of easily adaptable lifestyle changes that the average student can adapt two in the day to day.

Particularly for college students, eliminating driving from their daily life can often be an easy adjustment. The majority of students spend most of their time on campus or in their abode and with typical residences in close proximity to campus if not physically on the campus itself. For instances that further travel is required the campus is generally accommodating for the student as long as they elect to utilize those services. As is the case with RPI, student IDs serving as bus passes, and campus transportations (shuttle systems) for end to end commutes on and around campus.

For students that live on or off campus, mobility becomes a significant issue and as such it enhances the use of disposable products. While incredibly convenient, disposable products are often made of plastics that photo-degrade, and even the more eco-friendly alternatives enhance waste in the interim time while they biodegrade. This disposable mentality offers a slew of solutions to the most widely used, and widely disposed products on college campuses. Both in consumption and convenience, the access and supply of food is imperative and must be self-supplying. Whether part of a campus meal plan, purchasing food on campus, or self-supplying, and college student can decrease their waste by investing in a few key objects: silverware eliminates the need for plastic utensils at every meal, in addition to ensuring that utensils are always available as long as the student carries a set with them, easily thrown in a backpack or a coat pocket—both college staples. Hand in hand with the silverware is Tupperware; while more applicable to the student providing their own lunch, it also decreases food waste as a way to store left overs, and provides re-usable containers for both coming and going.

Looking around a campus it can be easy to spot the disposable “lunch-bags,” usually a repurposed plastic bag from one venue or another. While the bag does supply re-use, it is usually a single, secondary, use. While better than no reuse at all, these bags may serve a better by being recycled again into plastic bags as opposed to a re-use ending in the garbage as opposed to in the recycle; Investing in a re-usable lunch bag, whether a lunch box or a tote, will eliminate the plastic bag from the equation of lunch-time waste. Perhaps more applicable to the meal-plan student, a

reusable lunch bag would replace the plastic bag that the food supplier is providing the food in in the first place—particularly relevant to the RPI student and the Sedexo “to-go” meals which are always distributed in hefty plastic bags.

Lastly, every college student should invest in a thermos. Beyond the obvious need for a constant caffeine fix, a thermos can eliminate multiple kinds of waste. Applicable for both hot and cold, thermos's need not be only a wintertime fix. Economically, students may fill their own thermos as opposed to purchasing a coffee elsewhere—this is a more financially conscious alternative to purchasing a cup of coffee one, two, or multiple times a day. However, for the financially *unconscious*, a thermos still offers a sustainable solution to the daily coffee purchase(s) by simply filling the reusable thermos as opposed using “disposable” cups with each coffee. Even for the students on the meal plan, a thermos of their own eliminates the need for another “to-go” alternative that also perpetuates waste.

While by no means radical solutions, these suggestions are of course easily implementable, as well as both economically and environmentally conscious. As a student that is required by circumstance to be extremely economically conscious, it is often the financial investments in more sustainable options that is the deterrent—particularly in the cases of foods, clothing, and household products. Those of course all play a role in the matrix of sustainability; however they are also the few factors of a budget that is not out of the control of the student as is frequently the case with rent, utilities, and educational costs.

11. Write two exam questions that creatively test students' analytic sophistication about sustainability. Answer one of these questions.

- A. One component in the matrix of sustainability is the factor of cultural sustainability. This is often applied to historic or native cultures that are in risk of being overtaken by the majority-modern culture; however, in the case of modern cultures, this is only applied to humans, are the cultures and clans of various animals also relevant to the cultural sustainability paradox? Be sure to consider and clarify your definition of the word *Animal* in your answer.
- B. All of the factors of the matrix as described throughout the semester (organizational, ecological, social, legal, etc.) are traditionally evaluated from an anthropocentric point of view. Given the ecological origins of the sustainability debate, is it fair to continue it with an exclusively human focus?

Origins of the sustainability movement are most easily traced back to the green movements in the United States during the 1960s and 70s. This quickly gained the attention and stereotypes of the flower child, tree huggers, and hippies. The simultaneous economic and political struggles of the cold war and the war in Vietnam sharply divided the country, perhaps culminating in the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Under Reagan much of the ecological debate fell out of fashion in favor for political and economic strength within the country. Since, the nation has struggled with the green revolution and the need to gain recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of the capitalist. In order for the movement to gain momentum, perhaps it is necessary to keep it human-centered. Down to biology and Darwinian survival, humans are inherently selfish creatures. This leaves it obvious that in order to appeal to the human, the problem at hand must directly affect the human. This is most likely a direct cause of the struggle to acknowledge environmental deterioration essentially until super storms began effecting human habitation world-wide (especially in the first world).

Ecology is one of the main factors of sustainability, and perhaps the most recognizable. Because emotions must appeal to the individual, it is often difficult to argue the point of intrinsic value in the environment. Thus the matrix becomes an incredibly effective way to address sustainability in the modern language. The best way to address multiple issues is to establish a link betwixt them. By weaving ecological sustainability in with the political, social, cultural, economic, and every other exclusively human construction, it makes in inescapable, but also inherently human.

12. What attitudes and cultural constructs in the United States do environmental educators need to work against? Briefly describe at least one activity for k-12 students that would work against these attitudes and cultural constructs. Reference at least two films.

680 Words

Much of the energy spent on sustainability education, is spent raising awareness on the many facets of the issue. The most dangerous attitudes of sustainability are ignorance, apathy, and helplessness. The “tree-hugger” stereotype associated with people with environmental concerns has exacerbated the struggle for change. A step in the right direction was a rebranding of the issue from one of *environmentalism* to that of *sustainability*. In order to maintain the growing momentum behind the sustainability movement, changes must be made at the elementary level to make sustainability a fundamental concern in everyday life.

Since sustainability is a system of elaborating intertwined issues, dealing with it must become habit and replace the unsustainable habits of today ranging from food disconnect to the ability to throw things “away” as if they will be gone forever, with no consequence. In order to establish these daily habits, they must be learned early and cultivated until they are second nature—pun intended. In order to introduce a K-12 activity for students to combat the attitudes of ignorance, apathy, and helplessness, they must become empowered and not only believe, but realize, that within the hands of the generation, change is indeed possible. Education and discussions of sustainability are of course the first steps to combating ignorance; however apathy and helplessness are best combatted with action. To expel apathy, it must be replaced with passion. To expel helplessness, it must be replaced with results. An effective and relatively easy activity for elementary, middle, and high schools alike is to establish a community garden. Whether community wide, school wide, or classroom specific, cultivating a garden will not only establish essential team-building skills necessary for success, but also generate results and spur education on the dwindling agricultural skills.

As seen directly in the film Fresh, local farming can easily be done sustainably, alleviate hunger and health issues of malnutrition and an imbalanced diet, and best of all establish a precedent of self-sufficiency that is key to maintaining a sustainable system. Group farming of course produces a product, assuming the most practical content, a fruit and vegetable garden, it yields nutrient rich foods. These foods can fill a necessary void within both student diet and school food supply. In conjunction with the food product of the vegetable garden, it would also generate an economic precedent likened to that shown in the Transitions movie discussed in class. Whether traditional profit via selling produce from the garden, and a local currency circulated between classrooms, or years, or schools or communities, the vegetable garden is effective. Both through food and finances, establishing vegetable gardens to be cultivated by students establish self-dependence and financial independence, rewarding the growers in intelligence and a new skillset, eliminating helplessness, and

providing both nutritional and economic incentives to eradicate apathy and help to spur passion in the task at hand.

The importance of early onset sustainability education is undeniable. Like learning another language, the brain and body is most receptive in the young formative years of development. Learning the language of sustainability is no different. In order to make generational change, it must start with a generation. What better way to do so than by reformulating educational emphasis on sustaining a society, culturally, socially, behaviorally, organizationally, economically, ecologically.